

News from Rep. Stephanie Herseth

For Immediate Release

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HERSETH STATEMENT ON DECISION TO DELAY FSA OFFICE CLOSINGS

October 18, 2005, Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth today praised the decision by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to delay closing Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices nationwide, including as many as 14 county offices in South Dakota.

Herseth said, “I am pleased that USDA has decided against this ill-advised plan to close more than one-fourth of its county offices nationwide. I strongly opposed this initiative, and found the timing of the effort particularly troublesome. FSA offices provide farmers and ranchers with access to critical price support, conservation, and disaster programs – and they are a vital lifeline to thousands of families in South Dakota.

“I am an original cosponsor of legislation that would have delayed any closures until after Congress finalizes the next Farm Bill. The FSA will administer much of the next farm bill, which is at least two years away from passage. Because we have no way to anticipate FSA’s staffing needs until after that legislation has been passed, it makes no sense to close county offices now.

“This plan failed, in large part, because the FSA did not adequately consult with affected parties in advance. FSA officials should have conferred with farmers and ranchers, as well as with local and state FSA committees before announcing drastic structural changes. These are the folks that understand how FSA works on the ground and have valuable insight on how to streamline the agency without destroying its ability to deliver much-needed assistance to farmers and ranchers..

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Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth serves South Dakota in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate Democrats committed to fiscal discipline and strong national security, and is co-chair of the Rural Working Group, which is dedicated to raising the profile of issues important to rural America. She also serves on three committees vital to South Dakota's interests: Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs and Resources.